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Recommended Citation

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "Lewistown native chairs UM's Computer Department" (1981). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 6687.
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information services • university of montana • missoula, montana 59812

maribeth dwyer • news editor

brown/md
3/23/81
Lewistown News Argus, w/pic

LEWISTOWN NATIVE CHAIRS
UM's COMPUTER DEPARTMENT

by UM Publications and Media Relations

MISSOULA--

A Lewistown native is the new chairman of the Department of Computer Science in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Montana. John R. Barr graduated from Fergus County High School in 1965 and went on to earn a Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1978 while working for Hughes Aircraft as a staff engineer.

He then left private industry to join the faculty at the University of Montana because "I wanted to get back to the good country in Montana. I paid my dues in California."

Barr immediately became popular with students -- a computer printout on his office door reads "Dr. John's friendly neighborhood Barr," and his door is always open to students with questions or problems.

Barr has helped strengthen the computer science department in other ways as well. As a member of the executive board of DECUS, a computer users organization with 25,000 members, Barr has enhanced the reputation of UM's program and has stayed on top of advances in the field. He has also written successful grant applications that have permitted UM to purchase the latest in microcomputer equipment.

(over)

"LEWISTOWN" -- add one

But Barr's interests in promoting computer use and understanding extend beyond the confines of the UM campus. He maintains close ties in central Montana, and he has encouraged and assisted high schools there and elsewhere in the state in establishing computer science programs.

Recently he visited Lewis and Clark elementary school in Missoula bringing with him two of UM's personal computers. With them he demonstrated games that can be used in the elementary classroom to improve hand-eye coordination, drills to improve writing skills and a music composer.

On another level he was instrumental this past March in making UM the site of a national conference in computer aided instruction. Educators from around the country came to Missoula where they were exposed to new developments in computer use and technology for the classroom.

Like many who find fascination in the power and possibilities of the computer, Barr is something of a zealot. He believes that the advent of the small, relatively inexpensive microcomputer, or personal computer, heralds a new era, one in which at least some familiarity with computers on the part of educated people will be indispensable.

"Recent technological advances will make the personal computer a commonly used appliance by the time present grade school pupils graduate from high school or college," says Barr.

It is worth noting that in 1953 when Barr himself entered first grade in Stanford, Mont., the world's first computer was only three years older than he was.

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